



**April 2004 - Short Story Competition Winner**



# **The Wharram Hunt**

**By Loretta M. Thwaite**

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***“I need a figure head for my Wharram Cat – Interested?” “You’d be perfect!” “Come on, I’ll build you one and you’ll see...”  
“You need a what for a what?” “I’d be perfect at what?” “What are you talking about?” “Build a warren?” “Are you gonna breed rabbits?”***

This was to be my introduction to Polynesian Catamarans, more specifically *Wharram Cats*, although I really didn’t know it at the time. I wasn’t interested in catamarans as I had never been on one and so didn’t know what I might be missing out on. I wasn’t interested in being a figurehead, whatever that was and I certainly wasn’t interested in the man from Coastal Patrol who cast the line. I was quite content just being myself and had no particular plans for life. I had joined the local Coastal Patrol to find out more about boats due to a previous sea going venture.

A rather largely built 50-year-old friend of mine had invited me to join him on a short local trip. It was to take a vessel back to its mooring which was in a town about 100kms South of my home port. The boat belonged to one of his friends (another large 50+ year old). It was a luxury 55’ sports cruiser. He also brought another friend (yep, about the same age) who had not long been out of hospital and needed a little cheering up.

My friend tried to impress me by saying how much the vessel was worth and how fast it could go. He showed me all the fancy interior features, fullsize refrigerator with icemaker, double bed, ensuite, and the list goes on. Unfortunately, for all his efforts, all that I could see was that we were getting further from land, the water was getting darker and deeper and I was on a boat with three potentially instant heart attacks! I realised at that point that I knew nothing about boats and would be unable to get myself home should anything have happened to my fellow crewmen. I decided to join the Coastal Patrol as a means to learn enough to ensure this “lost at sea” feeling would never happen again.

The year was 2000, and there I was, learning about boats, minding my own business and enjoying my single life. Months later, I’d started to do some study for my regular employment. Most of the study needed to be done on a computer with access to the Internet. I didn’t have a computer and knew absolutely zero about the Internet. There was one person that I knew who could help and he didn’t live too far away. Yep, it was the man from Coastal Patrol who wanted to build me a boat...but I’d forgotten about that. I just needed a computer.

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He lived alone at this point in his life so I wasn't disturbing anyone else by using the computer each evening until my Certificate was completed. Spending so much time in each other's company gave way to a deeper friendship. While I was there he would often speak to me of his plans to build a catamaran. He would show me pictures of ones that he'd seen on the Internet and had pictures of his dreamboat, but only had a very small budget. He particularly liked the Wharram catamarans and had very quickly convinced me that they were the best in terms of safety and stability. As I became further entrenched in his dream safety and stability became some of my main concerns.

Having completed my Certificate, I then had time to have a look around the Internet for any possible purchases of a Wharram Cat that would suit us.

### *And so the Wharram Hunt began....*

It seemed that there were no Wharram cats in our area... we looked through binoculars at every catamaran that ventured into our small harbour. We studied various other types of cats and always came back to the Wharram. We could see what we thought were Wharrams cats on the horizon, but they never came into the harbour, at least not when we were looking! We were told of a small one moored up the creek, but we couldn't get close enough to look at it. We would have to look further afield to be able to even look at one close up.

Our first venture took us North to a small seaside resort town. We felt like we were doing a "David Attenborough" through the mangroves in all of the out of the way places to spot our prey. We were lucky. We found six Wharram cats that we could sit, stare, oggle at, and dream about how we might own one of them ourselves one day. We spoke to some of the people who owned them and this seemed to reinforce that they were what we were looking for. We came home with hope that there are Wharrams in our country and we might find one to suit us. But who would sell such a great boat?

We finally found one that suited and seemed within budget, but it was quite some distance away and this meant more time off work to even have a look at it. We travelled about 650km South to see his dreamboat, only to find it had already been sold but not taken off the Internet. However, there was another Wharram Catamaran for sale....it wasn't far away from the first one so we went to see it on our way home. It

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was part of someone's estate, the inheritor was not interested in boats. It was in such a mess, and going very cheaply...but it still floated and it was quite big and I fell in love with it straight away. I wanted to buy it. I enjoyed walking all over the deck and not feeling afraid that I would fall off. Cats are so different from monohulls, but I suppose its whatever you get used to and I'm not particularly used to anything except a Tinny. We came home and weighed up the pros and cons of purchasing this vessel. It was going to be too much fuss with too many unknowns. We couldn't look at it properly as there were no lift out facilities. The mast steps were rotting and there was a bit of water in the hulls (both salt and fresh) and we didn't really know how to sail and therefore could not assess whether this vessel would make it home by sea. By road it would cost more than the boat itself as it would need a Police escort all the way due to its width and length.

### ***To build or not to build?***

After months of tripping up and down the coast and checking all the "Boats for Sale" type sites on the Internet, we had a discussion. We were just in the wrong part of the country to consider buying a Wharram. It was decided that we would never know how well any of the "second-hand" Wharrams had been built or how old they were and or how well they'd been maintained, and that it would be in our best interest to build our own. If we did this we would know exactly what was holding us above water and how to fix it if something went wrong. It may take a couple of years, but we were both young enough to wait and to build our perfect dream. I had a house with a big yard and a couple of useable shed spaces, which I volunteered as available to use for building. I also volunteered to be "Dolly Girl".

Our next step was to decide which Wharram we really wanted to build. We knew roughly the size we wanted, so we made our decision quite quickly...it was to be a Tangaroa, of that we were sure. We liked the Classic look of the hulls and wanted to know there was something solid beneath us for when we sail through, over or onto (?) our coral reefs.

It was now April 2001 and we ordered our plans with excitement. We then had to make space by reshuffling the gear in the shed to begin the build. The plans arrived, and we studied them hard and in May we started our lines drawing and to understand the concept of this great design from its very beginnings. We were very happy with our decision. New life and new love was blooming and so was the project.

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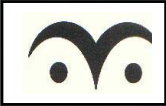
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In the months following, we still went to the harbour regularly to do our Coastal Patrol duty. I now knew with certainty what the Wharrams looked like and we were to see more of them than ever before, although mostly they were Pahis. In our thirst for knowledge and tips we badgered every Wharram crew that we had the chance to meet. We probably outstayed our welcome a few times as we often forgot that the sailors were weary after their long haul from the previous anchorage. We were just so happy to meet these people and catch a glimpse of their boats to take on any new or tried and true ideas. Talking to these people provided us with an invaluable insight into the Wharram way. We heard and saw first hand the variations that owners used because “it worked for them”. Each vessel was unique, due I guess to being home built. The welcome of these people also gave us enthusiasm at times when our build was getting boggy and we were yearning to be on the water.

### *The ultimate test-drive...*

The best thing that could ever have happened was when we found another Tangaroa moored outside the harbour wall. We couldn't believe our eyes. We approached with caution, as we didn't want to scare the man as we were in our Coastal Patrol uniforms. He welcomed us aboard, not knowing that the nature of our visit was purely social, and we all introduced ourselves. His name was Bob.

Bob had been in our area for a whole year and we hadn't seen him! We didn't know that he had been parked on the other side of nearby Islands and that he had made regular visits to the harbour for supplies. He had come there at times when we were at our regular jobs, through the weekdays. For the next few months we saw him come and go and we kept in contact whenever we could. It was unfortunate that we really didn't “discover” him until he was almost about to leave our marine community. Conversation was a bit hard at first as Bob had obviously been happy with his own company and that of his faithful travelling companion “Sheeba” the dog. We persisted with our contact as we had many questions of the man with the Tangaroa. We asked if we could take photos of various items so that we could better figure out the plans and we'd know what things were supposed to look like. Bob always was obliging to our requests. We had just started the makings of a great friendship when Bob told us he had to leave for the South due to family commitments. He offered to take us for a sail before he went.

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This day came and not too soon for us. We badly needed a lift in spirits and we still had quite a long way to go with our build. What a buzz! A chance to sail on something the same as what we were building. We had both major excitement and some trepidation about the trip. What if we don't like it? We were building a boat type that we had never been on, never sailed and had really no idea what to expect from our final product. Oh, yes, we had read the book "Two Girls, Two Catamarans", we had studied all the different types and eagerly read every piece of information on the various Internet forums, but to *really know* you just have to do it!

We got up early enough to be ready for the big day out. We took some food not knowing what our newfound friend liked to eat as offering of thanks for his kind gesture. We waited for him to row in his little dinghy to collect us from the shore, then we all set off for the Tangaroa.

Once settled, it was a simple matter of sail up, anchor up and we were off. Out from behind the harbour wall with no motor noise, no cost and with a peaceful gentle movement. What joyous pleasure! How far removed was this from the noisy, bumpy Coastal Patrol vessel that we were used to. Words cannot describe the feeling it gave us to know that we were building such a pleasurable craft. We knew then that we had made the right decision in our build.

It wasn't blowing very hard, only about 10 knots, but we were making way with no problems at all. We sailed out toward the nearby islands and around the bay for the next four hours. Bob showed us how easy it was to tack and stop when we needed to. We anchored off one of the islands and stopped for lunch and the chance for a swim in the tropical waters. It was a beautiful day to be out on the water, it was great to feel the gentle wind in your face and to be able to walk around the deck while sailing or while at anchor. The waves never worried us on the deck, not even when they splashed through the gaps in the back deck...it was nice to get a little bit wet and to cool down. It was also easy to change positions and not get wet at all if you didn't want to.

Bob's boat was kept simple for single handed sailing and it was just perfect (although needing a little paint here and there). We took this as a big tip...keep it as simple as possible and you'll have a lot less trouble. He probably didn't think it was anything great to have taken us out for a sail, but he couldn't have been more wrong if that was the case. When we sailed back into the spot behind the harbour wall a huge sense of

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disappointment came over us as this was the end of our journey, but it gave us more encouragement and recharged our batteries for getting our own boat into the water. Not long after our big day out, the early morning came, when we were there at the harbour, waving goodbye to our friends Bob and Sheeba. It was a sad occasion for us, for we knew we would not see him again for a couple of years, but on the bright side, by then we could sail beside him.

### ***Back to the build...***

Now with Bob gone, we have to concentrate on our own build. We aren't as interested in the passing Wharrams any more. We need to be focussed on getting ours into the water. We still have so much further to go. We have both of the hulls built and painted. The beams are nearly done and the fore and aft beams are already connected to the hulls. We still have to do the deck, mast steps, mast tops and of course the sails and rigging. All of the little metal bits are being prepared day by day to be sent away for galvanising. After all this is done, we have to think about the electric and electronic side of things and of course the plumbing. We will be keeping it as simple as we possibly can as we may even "make do" for a while until we get used to our new boat, but the launch day is in sight in dreamland and we will keep on building until we get there.

Speaking of dreamland, have you looked in the marine catalogues lately? It's funny how the marine advertisements keep suggesting the more expensive and difficult items as essential parts of your boat. You know what I mean, if you get the latest and greatest in electronic equipment, it is likely you'll need more power to run them, hence more expensive power sources. Mostly they are not needed for coastal sailing and the idea can be quickly discarded as a luxury item and surplus to requirements. There is not much marine shopping available in our area, so we have plenty of time to look through catalogues and really think hard about what our needs are. For a start we really only need bunks, food, sails and motor (as we are novices with the sailing bit). We won't be going far enough to need even a GPS straight away as we know the waters we will be sailing in. We will have the essential charts of course and probably a radio for logging our expected trip with our Coastal Patrol.

While the man is busy doing most of the work, my job is to mix the epoxy ready for

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use, mix the paint, and do the searching on the Internet for things that we might need to know. Doing the research is time consuming and hard on the eyes, especially after working on the computer all day, then coming home at night and doing it again. It's nice to see all the pictures of other people's Wharrams in their various stages of building and to see all the completed ones. Its good to look at the colour schemes and names and the great paint jobs that some of them have. The interiors are also very inspiring and it's just wonderful that people are willing to share what they have made with the rest of the world. I'm very impressed by the Wharram Cat, I'm very impressed with the Wharram site on the Internet, but most of all I am very impressed with the people who share their own dreams with others like us who are just starting out.

So the Wharram Hunt is over, until the next unsuspecting female hears a line like:

***“Do you like cats?”***

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